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SUBJECT: POLISH MFA: MIXED PROGRESS WITH EASTERN NEIGHBORS

REF: WARSAW 1140

Classified By: Political Counselor F. Daniel Sainz for reasons 1.4 (B) and (D)

¶1. (C) SUMMARY. Poland's engagement with Russia, Ukraine, and Belarus is yielding mixed results, according to Jaroslaw Bratkiewicz, Director of the MFA's Eastern Department. What Bratkiewicz described as a "pragmatic approach" toward Russia has led to some movement on historical issues and brought the two sides closer to conclusion of a small border traffic agreement despite occasional public controversies. While Poland and the EU maintain a dialogue with Ukraine, they expect no substantive progress on major issues until after the Ukrainian presidential election in January. On Belarus, many of the positive human rights developments appear to be cosmetic, but Warsaw will continue to engage Minsk for "lack of a better option." END SUMMARY.

APPROACH TO RUSSIA: BE FRIENDLY, BUT NOT A PUSHOVER  
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¶2. (C) Bratkiewicz asserted that Poland's "friendly, but not too mild" approach to Russia had achieved gradual progress on historical and economic issues. The two countries continue a pragmatic dialogue despite occasional public controversies concerning incidents like Russia's Zapad '09 military exercise in Belarus or FM Radoslaw Sikorski's November 4 remarks in Washington (reftel). Bratkiewicz said Zapad may have been an effort to test the GoP: the Russians may have wanted to see whether the Poles would be silent in order to maintain positive momentum in bilateral relations. Bratkiewicz attributed the provocative Zapad exercise to a contingent within the Russian military-industrial complex that favors the use of naked force and intimidation. In contrast, he praised Russian FM Sergey Lavrov's pragmatism, noting that Lavrov had been the first to say Sikorski must have been misquoted in an Interfax article. Bratkiewicz said the two Foreign Ministers enjoy a good working relationship.

¶3. (C) Bratkiewicz said Moscow and Warsaw are halfway through negotiating a small border traffic agreement that would allow residents along the Polish-Kaliningrad border to cross without visas. Poland, Russia and Lithuania are pushing the European Commission to allow the parties to extend the geographical coverage of the agreement to Gdansk and the entire Kaliningrad oblast, although the Commission could take a year to decide. The two governments had also agreed to launch joint historical institutes next year. According to Bratkiewicz, the bilateral Committee for Difficult Issues had some promising ideas for the April 2010 70th anniversary of the Katyn massacre.

UKRAINE: MAINTAIN DIALOGUE, HOLD OFF ON ACTION FOR NOW  
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14. (C) Bratkiewicz told us that Poland and the EU were engaged in a "symbolic" dialogue with Ukraine as they wait for the January presidential election. He predicted that the December 4 EU-Ukraine summit will yield no results. In contrast to MFA subordinates who had previously expressed concerns about Ukrainian opposition leader Viktor Yanukovich's Russia-friendly views, Bratkiewicz thought it made little difference whether PM Yulia Tymoshenko or Yanukovich won the presidential election. He asserted that both "served different oligarchs," but they will conduct similar foreign policies. He conceded, however, that Tymoshenko might lean more towards reinvigorating the EU-Ukraine dialogue. Bratkiewicz lamented that it will take at least 10 years to sweep out leaders interested primarily in their own enrichment, but the Polish Embassy in Kyiv was focused on identifying promising young leaders at the regional level.

#### BELARUS: STATUS QUO

15. (C) Bratkiewicz expressed pleasure with the EU decision to extend its sanctions mandate and waiver of travel restrictions against Belarusian leaders until October 2010. He complained that it was difficult to facilitate change there because Belarusian society is deeply Sovietized. Poland will continue to engage the Lukashenka regime for lack of a better option. Bratkiewicz added that Poland and Belarus were in the final stages of negotiating a small border traffic agreement that would allow those living along the Polish-Belarusian border to cross without visas.

FEINSTEIN